



Cabinet (Resources) Panel

20 January 2015

Report title	Investing To Save: Improving The Quality Of Early Intervention By Social Workers By The Reduction Of Caseloads	
Decision designation	AMBER	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Val Gibson Children and Young People	
Key decision	Yes	
In forward plan	No	
Wards affected	All	
Accountable director	Linda Sanders, People	
Originating service	Children and Young People	
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Report to be/has been considered by	N/A	

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Cabinet (Resources) Panel is recommended to:

- i) Approve the establishment of three additional social work units to undertake intervention activities with the objective of reducing expenditure on looked after children and reducing caseloads.
- ii) Approve the use of £500,000 from the Looked After Children's service budget to fund this investment and achieve cost avoidance by continuing to reduce the numbers of looked after children
- iii) Approve option 1 - Peripatetic Units as the preferred approach to maximising effectiveness of the additional resources.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report proposes the establishment of three additional social work units within Children's social care to improve capacity to work with children in need of specialist services. This will provide services at a more intensive level and prevent the rise in looked after children. The proposal will also reduce increasing caseloads which are currently impacting on quality of practice and retention, which prevents the opportunity for front line managers to develop social workers to provide greater quality of service to the City's most vulnerable children and young people.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Cabinet (Resources) Panel received a paper on 23 July 2013 outlining the factors behind a £5.0 million overspend in 2012/13 in the services concerned with Children in Need (CiN), Child Protection (CP) and Looked After Children (LAC). That paper noted the fundamental reason behind the overspend as being the rise in children and young people needing services, and in particular the rise in the number of LAC with the average placement cost per child being £40,000 per annum.
- 2.2 Cabinet (Resources) Panel subsequently agreed in September 2013 to provide additional resources for two social work units at a full year cost of £527,000. The additional social work units were created in Areas 1 and 2 serving the whole of the Bilston area. These became operational in July 2014 as part of the reconfiguration of Children and Families Services known as the New Operating Model (NOM). In addition, Cabinet (Resources) Panel agreed that the investment would be in two stages and that the impact of stage one and the two additional social work units should be monitored with the second stage being implemented following demonstrable evidence of positive outcomes. This was also agreed as part of an overall plan of service changes aimed at ensuring that only those children and young people who need to be looked after are part of the looked after children system.
- 2.3 The impact of stage one and the additional social work units within the context of the implementation of the NOM has been subject to a full evaluation. This was reported to The Leader of the Council, Councillor Lawrence; Councillor Gibson, Cabinet Lead for Children and Families; and Councillor Johnson, Cabinet Member for Resources on the 10 December 2014. The evaluation concluded that the allocation of additional social work resources to Areas one and two across the Bilston area has provided some exciting opportunities to enhance practice and the management of both workload and partnership arrangements. This has positively impacted on the services to children and their families by providing greater opportunity to undertake more intensive individual work as well as improving the quality of both assessment and care planning. Although early days, it was concluded that this approach should eventually reduce the numbers of referrals meeting the social care threshold. This includes the number of children receiving looked after services, which although stable since May 2014, continues to threaten an upward trend. As a result of the NOM implementation it is estimated that the service has avoided additional costs of in the region of £2.0 million. This is based on the assumption that numbers of LAC would have continued to increase in line with 2013/14 trends.

2.4 Councillors Lawrence, Gibson and Johnson supported the implementation of stage two which is the proposed allocation of staffing resources to the equivalent of three additional social work units. It was acknowledged this will enable services to effectively address rising caseloads by providing greater opportunities to undertake more intensive direct work with children. If additional resources aren't agreed then the evidence suggests caseloads will continue to rise, impacting on the quality of service provision, leading to higher numbers of children receiving expensive specialist services and potential higher turnover of staff due to lowering of morale and increased sickness.

3.0 Progress, Options, Discussion

3.1 There are key pressure points across Children's Social Care which adversely impact on the delivery of assessment and care management services. These are being caused by the high numbers of referrals into the children's social care system. Considerable work is currently taking place to ensure the front end of the service maintains consistent application of thresholds and more developments are planned. However there is still a high number of referrals that currently meet the correct threshold for assessment and this combined with those cases which require longer term specialist care management cause pressures and impact on the efficient progress of cases. Therefore there are a number of areas where additional resources will ensure more effective progress and resolution of work across the whole system. Most importantly, earlier intervention will eventually reduce the numbers of looked after children.

3.2 In addition, the recruitment and retention of front line managers and social workers continues to present challenges. The most recent round of recruitment appointed three permanent Consultant Social Workers (CSW). There are only ten permanent CSWs across an establishment of 29 posts. The remaining vacancies are covered by agency managers. All of the managers hold caseloads of children with more complex needs. Caseloads for these managers are currently as high as 25 cases. These managers should ideally hold no more than 6 cases and be able to use these cases to train newly qualified and inexperienced social workers through joint working. These large caseloads are impacting on their ability to effectively manage both social workers and their caseloads, and drive up quality interventions with children and families. The competing demand of the roles of casework and management is impacting on the Council's ability to recruit and retain experienced and skilled staff in these crucial posts.

3.3 A resource of £500,000 will provide approximately an additional 12 social workers. After careful consideration, taking in to account the challenges already highlighted, it is proposed to use any agreed additional resource on employing social workers and save on additional management and administration costs. This will make the most effective use of the additional resource. It will also reduce the need for the current level of agency staff including temporary additional staff over the current assignment. Current recruitment history both locally and regionally suggests that the workers recruited will be predominantly newly or recently qualified. They will require good levels of management support and professional development. However, providing this additional resource will enable the front line managers to become free of their caseloads and therefore enable

capacity to effectively develop these additional workers into highly skilled and experienced staff.

3.4 Option 1: Peripatetic units

To provide 3 peripatetic social work units which will focus on pressure points across the service. These will include: speeding up the assessment process for earlier resolution; stepping down social care cases to early help services and progressing cases that require child protection planning, court work and care planning more effectively leading to earlier and less costly resolution. This will also include focussing on effective permanency planning to ensure cases are fully resolved at an early date. Each unit will undertake an assignment of up to six months in a defined area of the service to reduce pressure and improve workflow before moving onto a new area of practice. Effective management and administration support will be identified from the existing resource.

3.5 Option 2: Developing specialist units

This would utilise the additional social workers into three specialist units to work on defined areas of service need across the assessment and care management service area. An example could include a defined court team working with applications within public law proceedings speeding up the court process and ensuring all deadlines were serviced promptly. This can be achieved to some extent through the vehicle of option one if carefully managed.

3.6 Option 3: Spreading the additional resource across the whole service

This proposal would be for the additional resource to be split up and added to existing units. On average this would add one social worker to 12 social work units, although some additional realignment to particularly pressurised areas could be agreed.

3.7 Option 4: Maintain current status quo

This option will leave the current staffing assignment in its overall position although the staff resource could be realigned to meet identified areas of service pressures. This would require identifying social workers with spare capacity and the flexibility to move away from defined geographically located and serving units.

3.8 Options Appraisal

Option	Advantages	Disadvantage
1 - Peripatetic units	<ul style="list-style-type: none">This will provide service flexibility against assessed areas of needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The units could become ensnared, supporting teams with low staffing on a longer term basis thus losing their effective role.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It will provide measurable progress against defined service targets, freeing up existing capacity to develop more in depth and quality practice on existing cases. • The nature of the flexibility of this model will enable different areas of practice demand to be addressed simultaneously. • The three units can be utilised flexibly according to identified service pressures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The peripatetic model could have an adverse impact upon case allocation and stability for service users due to changes in social worker. This will require effective and careful management.
<p>2 -Developing specialist units</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would promote improved relations with particular partners and • The specialism would enable greater concentration of specialist expertise in one service area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential loss of specialist knowledge across existing units. • Greater number of changes in allocated social worker impacting on children and families. • There would also be less flexibility to respond to other service pressures in different parts of the service.
<p>3 - Spreading the additional resource across the whole service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would provide temporary additional capacity • This could include the option of the additional worker having a defined role including providing a duty role for the team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The additional resource would spread the capacity too thinly across the whole service reducing the impact of positive change. • Additional resource may be incorporated into the staffing assignment without a clearly defined role and purpose. • Any defined specialist role would be in danger of being subsumed due to staff shortages.

Option	Advantages	Disadvantage
<p>4 - Maintain current status quo</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No additional resources would be required. • This would provide the least organisational change to the current structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is in conflict with the findings of the recent evaluation of the current additional capacity which identifies rising caseloads even in those better resourced Areas. • This also relies on the CSW to hold onto their existing caseloads which will reduce the time spent on supporting and assisting workers. • This option is most likely to lead to continuing service pressures, impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the throughput of work and contribute to reduced staff morale, sickness and difficulties in recruitment and retention.

3.9 Having considered the options appraisal, the preferred option for the service area is option one. This option will enable a resource to be targeted at recruiting up to an additional 12 peripatetic social workers to be used in a flexible way to meet service demands and challenges across the whole of Children’s social care. This option would free up the capacity of the current CSW’s to focus on supporting case management and the professional development of the social workers in order to improve the quality of assessments, care management and the throughput of work, thus impacting positively on outcomes for children and their families and further preventing the need for children to become looked after.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 The cost of the additional peripatetic social workers have been assessed using maximum scale point of pay grades and including employers’ national insurance and pension fund contributions. On this basis, the indicative cost is £500,000.

4.2 It is expected that the indicative cost of £500,000 will be funded from savings generated within the Looked After Children’s Service, however, if this is not the case then it will be funded from the efficiency reserve.

4.3 The average cost of a LAC placement is calculated to be £40,000. Therefore, in order for this proposal to achieve a successful pay back of the £500,000 the LAC population requires a reduction of thirteen clients initially.’

4.4 Financial monitoring will be performed to assess the extent to which the additional peripatetic social workers have been successful in preventing costs that would otherwise have been incurred.

[NM/07012014/B]

5.0 Legal implications

5.1 Child Protection services and services to Looked After Children and children in need provided primarily under the Children Act 1989, are statutory Social Services functions under Schedule 1 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970. Under section 7 of the Act these services must be provided under the direction of the Secretary of State. The Council as a Social Services Authority does, however, have discretion as to how it organises its services. This report also supports the Council's duties as an employer under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to provide a safe system of work and manage employee workloads.

[TJ/08012015/K]

6.0 Equalities implications

6.1 An Initial Equality Impact screening has been completed. There are no equality implications identified. The additional resources will positively impact on supporting and improving delivery services to some of our most deprived communities.

7.0 Environmental implications

7.1 There are no environmental implications.

8.0 Human resources implications

8.1 There will be implications for the recruitment and development of additional staff.

9.0 Corporate landlord implications

9.1 There are no corporate landlord implications identified. Existing buildings where social workers are currently located will be utilised.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.1 Report on the Impact of Additional Social Work Units to undertake Early Intervention under the New Operating Model. Report to the Looked After Children Budget Group of 10th December 2014.

10.2 Investing To Save: Improving the Quality of Early Intervention by Social Workers by the Reduction of Caseloads – Report to the Cabinet (Resources) Panel September 2013.